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NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2004

Ocean-side conference gets down to business & offers participants fun

by Elisabeth Gumnior
James Madison University

The PCAS/ACAS conference always offers a healthy mix of serious academic work, fun and entertainment, but nowhere moreso than in Jacksonville, Florida. The Sea Turtle Inn offers the most beautiful vistas at any time of the day. What could be better than watching the sun rise, the pelicans make their way along the beach in small groups, or the tide come and go from your room's little balcony before going off to sessions on the philosophical underpinnings of films, food and Buffy studies. Around midday you can take a walk on the beach, or lunch on the terrace. Meanwhile in Virginia, where I come from, it is a cold blustery October day.

With an impressive array of sessions, 85 altogether, the 2003 conference did not disappoint. Conference cochairs Mary Alice Money and Rhonda Wilcox

assembled a strong program; there were three sessions on Buffy studies, two on the Matrix, five on various film topics, and another four on various TV topics. Rhetoric was the topic of six sessions and pedagogy the topic of five. Discussions of fiction(s), serious as well as pulp, made up another important group of sessions. The unofficial prize for most intriguing presentation title must go to "George W.'s Agincourt, or: Shakespeare 'Embedded' in Iraq." The prize for the "most cryptic title for a session" probably has to go to "NASCAR and Cracker Kung Fu."

In case you have not heard yet, the South has expanded into the Northwoods of Wisconsin and the Great Lakes Region. Our reach extends as far as California and even Israel. Still the majority of the participants came from *the South* in order to

discuss topics and ideas that even our best friends and colleagues might find too trivial to warrant serious scholarly consideration.

The conference participants also found occasion to celebrate—as conference participants often do—their colleagues' accomplishments. The Awards Reception took place on the Veranda with food, drink, and lots of chatting. The awards were presented in the following categories:

- The Prize for Best Essay in *Studies in American Culture*
James S. Miller, " 'The Right and Lucky Man': Raymond Chandler and the Myth of Tough Writing"

- The Prize for Best Essay in *Studies in Popular Culture*
Tom Henthorne, "Cyber-utopias: The Politics and the Ideology of Computer Games"

- The Roger Rollin American Culture Award, presented by Roger Rollin himself,

1st Place: Timothy F. Brown for his paper, "Movietone and the Japanese – How Hollywood Portrayed America's Enemy Before and During WWII."

2nd Place: Dava L. Simpson for her paper, "Framing Masculinity: Shyamalan's Cinematic Comic Book *Unbreakable*."

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Book Reviews

Anatol, Giselle Liza, ed. *Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays*. Giselle Lisa Anatol, ed. *Contributions to the Study of Popular Culture, Number 78*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003.

Whited, Lana A., ed. *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2002.

Harry Potter, inspiring and stimulating to scholars? Isn't the Harry Potter series just a children's literature craze? Not by a longshot, at least not as far as Lana Whited or Giselle Liza Anatol are concerned. In fact, the two editors argue that as scholars and as a society we ought to be having serious discussions about the literary merit of the Harry Potter series, precisely because the books have attracted such crazed attention from readers of all ages and cultures. Anatol argues in her introduction that "[the] Potter series could become this generation's most formative narratives, and it needs exploration and study rather than rejection as simply pulp, pop culture, or the latest fad" (xv). As a Harry Potter fan myself, and a staunch defender of the inherent critical value of the books, I thoroughly enjoyed the two volumes. Both are able to capture not only the varied perspectives from which Harry Potter is examined by those

in the Ivory Tower, but also the urgent need for such examinations. Moreover, with contributors from the US, the UK, Canada, and Australia, both collections demonstrate that I am not alone in my quiet obsession with the Potter books. Scholarly engagement with Harry Potter is an international pursuit.

The first three chapters of Whited's book explore "Harry's Cousins in the Magical Realm," "Harry's Roots in Epic, Myth, and Folklore," and "Harry's Other Literary Relatives." From examinations of similarities of Rowling's work with works by C.S. Lewis, Ursula LeGuin and others, to detailed comparisons of the Harry Potter stories with folk tales and British public school stories, these three chapters demonstrate the multi-layered literary heritage of Harry Potter. The seven contributors to this section explore the hidden depths of the Harry Potter series by tracing the varieties of intertextuality Rowling employs. In her essay, "The Education of a Wizard," Pat Pinsent concludes that despite the many similarities to other books, the issue is not whether Rowling uses a similar textual vocabulary as other authors before her, but that she uses that vocabulary "with a wider range of levels of meaning and thus appeal[s] to audiences of all ages" (49). Moreover, Pinsent argues that the complex references to "specific earlier works; well-known stories existing in several versions; archetypes; genres and convention; and occasionally other discourses" not only evoke familiar images for

some readers, but also serve as a pre-text and introduction to the earlier works for others (49).

Anatol's contributors, in the second part of her book, "Literary Influences and Historical Contexts," also trace the references to literary traditions Rowling draws upon, such as the historical abolitionist tradition and fairy tale motives with which she "attempts to combat the present day evils of racism and materialism" (Anatol xvii). In "Hermione and the House-Elves: The Literary and Historical Context of J.K. Rowling's Antislavery Campaign," Brycchan Carey approaches the issue from two perspectives. First he shows how Rowling uses Hermione's campaign against house-elf enslavement as a model for political participation and activism for young people. Secondly, he traces the literary tradition of antislavery motives in British

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PCAS NEWSLETTER

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children's literature. He concludes that Rowling's use of the slavery as well as the race issue in the Harry Potter series "provides an approach to the problem of bigotry and discrimination that allows young people to grasp the truth on first reading and later learn how that truth has been applied and abused in the historical world" (114).

Both Whited's and Anatol's collections also contain essays that deal with the complex moral and ethical structures in Harry Potter's world. In the chapter "Greater than Gold in Gringott's," Farah Mendlesohn comes to the rather sweeping conclusion that Rowling's refusal to engage with ideology, leads to a "muddled morality that cheats the reader: while the books argue superficially for fairness ["rooted in a distinctly English liberalism" (159)], they actually portray privilege and exceptionalism" (181). Whited herself, together with Katherine Grimes, counters Mendelsohn's assessment by examining the Harry Potter series "in light of the examples of moral and ethical decision making Rowling provides for young readers" (Whited and Grimes 183). In "What Would Harry Do?" the two authors use

Lawrence Kohlberg's scheme of moral maturation to examine the moral and ethical behavior of a variety of characters. Whited and Grimes posit that young readers should be allowed to work through any "cognitive disequilibrium" that might occur with appropriate guidance, and that they also "should be encouraged to develop their own critical faculties and judgements" (207).

The contributors to Anatol's book discuss topics ranging from legal concepts of the wizarding world to Rowling's attitudes toward socioeconomic class status. Anatol herself thoughtfully and thoroughly explores neocolonialism and xenophobia in the Harry Potter books. She argues that "although the Potter series attempts to embrace ideas of global equality and multiculturalism, the stories actually reveal how difficult it is for contemporary British subjects such as Rowling to extricate themselves from the ideological legacies of their ancestors" (165). Given the ease with which literature can be wielded as a weapon of forced assimilation, Anatole points out, it is important to understand the Imperialist ideology encoded within it "and contest it within our daily lives" (175).

Gender issues also appear in both books. The essay by Eliza T. Dresang in Whited's book offers an exploration of the heritage of gender in Rowling's descriptions of Hermione Granger. Dresang analyzes the clues Rowling offers as to the possible development of Hermione's character and role in future books of the series. She

begins with a description of other Hermiones in literature and proceeds from there through a very careful feminist analysis of Rowling's construction of gender. Dresang points out, several times in the book, that there is no single way to conceive of such a feminist critique because there is no single feminist theory and approach. "There is no unified one way for a woman to be, no feminist ideal that can be articulated and applied," she concludes. Hermione is not a paragon feminist role model, but she is actively "seeking what she wants to become with a healthy concern and respect for both self and others" (241).

Ximena Gallardo-C. and Jason Smith come to a similar conclusion in their essay "Cinderfella: J.K. Rowling's Wily Web of Gender." They point out that "although Rowling draws long and deep from a fairy-tale and fantasy tradition steeped in misogyny and gender stereotyping, she is seldom at its mercy." Rather Gallardo-C. and Smith point out she has "created the context for an active discussion of social issues, including . . . sex and gender" (Gallardo-C. and Smith 203).

The chapters on values and gender issues in both books reveal that Rowling herself does carry certain ideological baggage. However, as Dresang points out, maybe the object of even the most careful analysis and critique of Rowling's work is not to determine what she should or could have done with her characters and plots, but how much self-determination she allows them in

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· The Ray and Pat Brown Popular Culture Award

1st Place tie: Jennifer Davis and Kathy Whitaker for their paper, "Magick in the Media: Alternative Religions in Book Film and Television." and: Adrian L. Cook for his paper, "The Color of Zion: The Growth and Popularization of the American Captivity Narrative from Frederick Douglass to Matrix: Reloaded"

2nd Place: Molly Knight for her paper, "Wild and Untamed Thing: Sex and the Gothic in *Frankenstein* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*"

The work of students, both graduate and undergraduate, honored with the Roger Rollin and Ray and Pat Brown Awards proved once again that the future of our various disciplines is in good hands and that we should all encourage student participation in this conference. Eleven graduates and six undergraduates submitted papers.

Past President John Zubizaretta was recognized for his work on behalf of the organization, as were the co-chairs of the 2003 program Mary Alice Money and Rhonda Wilcox.

Of course, there is also a serious side to a conference. The General Business Meeting introduced the new officers. While the 2003 President, Larry Vonalt was not present, he was nonetheless present in the thoughts of all the participants. Bill Klink was introduced as the new Vice President/President Elect and Bennett Kravitz and Dennis Bounds as the new

Members-at-Large. Departing Members-at-Large Elsa Nystrom and Mary Alice Money were applauded for their hard work.

Putting together a program for the conference together is hard work indeed, and volunteers for the job are not easy to find. President Rob McDonald pointed out that several people were on his "coercion list" and would most likely be called upon to serve as chairs or co-chairs in the near future.

The Executive Committee promised to discuss and make their positions known as soon as possible on the following issues:

· The problem of A/V equipment: due to the rates hotels and conference centers charge for such equipment, the group discussed whether or not the PCAS/ACAS should buy its own projector equipment or whether program chairs would be able to convince local businesses to make such equipment available for free. The Executive Committee was charged with developing a digital media policy as soon as possible.

· The Awards Luncheon: the luncheon had been abandoned because attendance had dropped off and participants were not happy with the obligatory rubber-chicken meals. However, the attendees of the evening reception found it too scattered and missed the more coherent structure of the luncheon. All conference participants were called on to keep their eyes and ears open for alternative venues and formats, and for further improvements.

· A policy on multiple proposal submissions: as of now, the policy on submissions is an unwritten one. While multiple submissions for papers are not acceptable, participants are allowed to serve in multiple roles, such as presenters, program chairs, and discussants in roundtable sessions. The issue is one of fairness and control over an ever-expanding program. The Executive Committee also promised to look into the possibility of saving presentation slots for late-breaking opportunities.

· The selection of conference sites: the group discussed making Jacksonville the anchor site to return to every two or three years and to rotate other sites such as Charlotte, Nashville, and Savannah. The location for conferences is important to build a regular and growing crowd of participants. The possibility of using university sites was also discussed as a way to reduce cost for participants and gain access to technology.

With the decision to return to Jacksonville every other year for the next six years, the Executive Committee resolved at least part of the conference-location question. This decision should bring growing numbers of participants to the conference and make future programs even more interesting and worthwhile.

But before we return to Jacksonville, we can look forward to another wonderful location, New Orleans, Louisiana. See you in September.

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an admittedly imperfect world. The same goes for Rowling herself: how much room does she allow herself to subvert the stereotypical structures, characters, and behaviors she is part of? A young reader quoted in Dresang's essay points out that "the wizard world as portrayed by JKR is an ironic image or a copy of our society...just think of the style of the newspaper articles, the organization of the ministry and of the school, how Fudge talks exactly like all politicians" (237). I think this young reader instinctively feels that Rowling does try to create a mirror in which we can see our own world and through which we could imagine and create a better one (much like the mirror of Erised).

Both books also contain essays on topics unique to each collection. The first part of

Anatol's book, for example, is dedicated to "Reading Harry Potter Through Theories of Child Development." The various authors use Jungian and Freudian approaches and examine learning at Hogwart's both in and outside of the classroom. Whited's chapter, "Harry's Language: Taking Issue With Words," juxtaposes two very informative essays on the problems of transfiguring language (changing the original version to a more Americanized one) and of outright translation—the author of that essay offers a detailed comparison between the German, French, and Spanish translations.

Whited's book concludes with a rather extensive, 20-page bibliography that is sure to draw any potential Potter scholar even deeper into the issues presented by Whited's contributors.

Anatol's book contains a selected bibliography, focusing

on various theoretical approaches; only thirteen items are common to both bibliographies, which once again demonstrates the depth of the body of scholarly and popular writing on the topic. Both books are fascinating contributions to what is already a thriving field of research. As Rowling's series continues beyond the fourth book, it will be interesting to see whether and how the analyses and critiques articulated in these two collections will change. Book Five, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, already gives readers of these essays a chance to extend and refute some of the arguments presented. Possible future editions of critical essays will show how our scholarly assessment of the series develops and changes.

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JW Marriott in New Orleans Hosts 2004 Conference

The 2004 PCAS/ACAS conference will be held at the JW Marriott Hotel in New Orleans Thursday, Sept. 23, through Saturday, Sept. 25. The deadline to register is August 27, 2004.

The JW Marriott is located at 614 Canal St., New Orleans, LA 70130. The phone number is 1 504-525-6500.

According to its web site, "The JW Marriott New Orleans is ideally located on Canal Street at the entrance to the French Quarter. The bright and whimsically decorated hotel captures the spirit and essence of New Orleans. Guest rooms are

appointed with amenities that will make your stay productive and memorable."

The Hotel web site also provides information about the city. It points out that, "New Orleans is



like no other place in the world. It is often referred to as the most European of American cities, but it is much more than that: start with Amsterdam, stir in some Caribbean, add dashes of Cartagena and Memphis, and you've just begun the recipe. If you become even passingly familiar with the city's character and history, it will seem perfectly natural that this one culture produced people as different as Louis Armstrong, Richard Simmons, and Anne Rice . . . In New Orleans you can hear some of

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the best traditional jazz in the world In addition to Louis Armstrong, New Orleans has produced such notable musicians as Dr. John, Professor Longhair, Harry Connick, Jr., and the Marsalis and Neville clans. African influences can also be detected in the city’s cuisine. New Orleans’s original population of Africans, Spanish, French, Choctaw Indians, and Acadians all contributed to the city’s celebrated food.

Many visitors spend their entire New Orleans stay in the French Quarter. While entertaining and fun, a trip limited to the French Quarter will not leave you with a feel for the city as a whole. Uptown, Mid-City, the Warehouse District, and the Garden District all provide a glimpse into the daily routines, coffee shops, and lush cityscapes that New Orleanians treasure.”

Check out the PCAS/ACAS Web Site
<http://www.pcasacas.org/>

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